

improving the allocation of resources at the same time as improving services to the majority of consumers.

Leading governments at the state and federal levels are looking for solutions that integrate their agencies to better serve the government-to-citizen, government-to-business, and citizen-to-business roles. Local governments are seeking to become the “hub of a community wheel” in which the citizens are using the government to link to the community in new and exciting ways. The extent to which e-government will make a difference and add value, however, will depend primarily on the leadership involved and how well the transition is managed.

The successful migration to e-government will be as much about change management and risk management as finding the right technology. This will require more than having a vision and e-government rhetoric. Sound leadership will be required to ensure that the public sector workforce is ready to meet the challenges ahead.

Implementation will evolve over time, but it must be done thoughtfully and carefully. At its core, e-government must be directed at making government serve taxpayers better. E-government will have a positive impact on government by changing the way services are delivered and accessed. The pre-Internet years of standing in lines and completing forms will eventually be displaced.

In some ways, the road ahead for government lies through uncharted territory. If the Information Revolution is changing society as pervasively as the Industrial Revolution did, the twenty-first century will see the emergence of a very different society. And that society will require a very different kind of government. Technology allows us to do old things in ways that were not possible before, and it allows us to do entirely new things.

---

*We must keep our eyes on the vision but also pay attention to the complex realities of implementing that vision.*

---

The hurdles are real enough. But e-government is on the way and it will change everything. Six years ago e-government barely existed. Today, millions of Americans can enter the virtual halls of government from their homes and businesses. We need to ensure that when they get there, they find that e-government lives up to its promise of slashing red tape, shrinking bureaucracy, and giving individuals greater control of their lives.

The vision of digital government created by these images is powerful and compelling. We must keep our eyes on the vision but also pay attention to the complex realities of implementing that vision. Digital government initiatives, of whatever types, are complex mixtures of technological, managerial, and policy-related challenges. The risk of not understanding and addressing these complexities is costly failure. Realizing the promise will require vision balanced with realistic expectations, foresight balanced with 20/20 hindsight, and an expectation that some failures will inform our successes.

Early estimates of how long it will take to realize the promise of digital government were very optimistic. As governments recognize the full complexities of the transformation required, these estimates become more conservative. Most estimates are moving from one year to five years and beyond. The more governmental transformation is required to effect real change, the longer the estimate. Placing government information on the Web for public access can be done sooner. Providing government-to-government information sharing to support improved service delivery—basically creating cross-program integration—will take longer. True digital democracy may take even longer.